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# New Perspectives

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# International Relations Scholarship at 100: Publicism, Truth-Pluralism and the Usefulness Problem

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**Abstract:** Revisionist studies have shown that stories about International Relations' (IR) supposed disciplinary birth in 1919 function to obfuscate the history of international thought. 1919 has nonetheless cast a long shadow over how the usefulness of professional scholarship in International Relations has been conceptualised. In this article, I trace how the 1919 birth-story orientated disciplinary constructions of the usefulness of the field as they relate to pluralist approaches to truth-seeking in IR. I argue that the centenary of 1919 reminds us of the publicist as well as pluralist scholarship of the inter-war years. Our discipline's supposed centenary should therefore foster a drive towards better communication with global IR's publics and, in this way, ensure that we are better equipped to deal with the so-called post-truth era.

**Keywords:** usefulness, 1919, pluralism, publicism, International Relations, IR Century, IR Centenary, post-truth

## INTRODUCTION

IR's 1919 is a myth, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't ask what legacy that myth has had, and how it informed later disciplinary developments (Buzan and Lawson, 2015; Carvalho et al., 2011; Hobson, 2012; Armitage, 2013; Ashworth, 2013; Thies, 2002; Quirk and Vigneswaran, 2005; Schmidt, 1998; Osiander, 1998). To paraphrase Peter Novick's (1988: 1) seminal study of the historical profession, for International Relations (IR) "[usefulness] was the rock on which the venture was constituted, its continuing *raison d'être*... [yet it] is clearly not a single idea, but rather a sprawling collection of assumptions, attitudes, aspirations, and antipathies". In this article, I argue that the usefulness of IR scholarship today should be understood as intimately tied to its vocation for publicism. I examine how the relationship between usefulness and truth has been constructed in IR theoretical scholarship over the last one hundred years. I argue that the history of debates about the usefulness of IR as a truth-seeking academic endeavour are part of the legacy of the 1919 'birth story', which led to the proliferation of theoretical paradigms that claim equal validity for

diverse accounts of, and approaches to, theorising the international. This is a condition which I term ‘truth-pluralism’ and which characterises the discipline today (see Levine and McCourt, 2018). Reassessing the legacy of 1919, I argue, establishes the need for a return to publicism as the necessary partner for truth-pluralism in IR.

In the first section I examine the revisionist consensus on 1919. This consensus suggests that the inter-war period, which followed IR’s disciplinary ‘birth’ but preceded its disciplinary periodisation and professionalisation, was characterised by scholar-publicists who were engaged with plural public audiences, and understood their professional role as constitutively related to being effective communicators with those plural publics. Recognising this pre-professional, scholar-publicist mode is important if we wish to understand how the discipline’s accounts of its own usefulness – and relations between usefulness and truth-seeking – evolved out of the birth-story of 1919. My principal argument is that the key legacy of the 1919 birth story was a belief that progress towards capturing ‘the truth’ about the international is the object of IR as a discipline, and that this truth is the source of its utility. This understanding of the discipline, whereby the usefulness of IR is seen as a function of approximating ‘the truth’ through theoretical progress, I refer to as “truth monism”.

In the second section I re-examine the disciplinary great debates which arose out of the 1919 birth story. Concern about the ways in which the pursuit of truth-monism resulted in forms of knowledge which appeared to align uncomfortably with the interests of states, which was expressed by various authors during the 1960s and 1970s, gave rise to greater theoretical pluralism in the 1980s and 1990s. In these latter debates, pluralization was seen as a means to recovering the wider usefulness of the discipline. Theoretical pluralization led to concerns about a narrowing in the audiences IR scholars targeted with their publications. Pluralization created a fractured discipline of theoretical subcultures which largely abandoned any sense of a vocation for publicism. By “publicism”, I refer to an understanding of scholarly publication that prioritises communicability with its diverse array of potential publics. These publics may include policy-makers and other interested users of IR scholarly knowledge, but also a more general audience due to a sense of responsibility for public education, as the researchers present their research findings in language that is not only comprehensible to scholarly in-group or practitioner audiences.

In the final section, I examine how the contemporary communicative environment frames the challenge of a return to publicism in the discipline today, and how this intersects with publishing architectures in the field. The article argues that the ‘1919 birth story’ overwhelmingly misrepresents the first ‘great debate’ as being a contest over the ‘truth’ of IR. This misrepresentation institutionalised a ‘monist’ conception of IR’s vocation, which institutionalised a victory of truth-seeking over communicability. This in turn led, despite intermittent local resistance, to today’s cacophony of mutually and externally unintelligible IR theories, a predicament that

has now unhappily merged with an internet-and-populist-induced post-truth world. In this situation, it is now more important than ever for IR to recover the 'publicist' register that has been so problematically marginalised by the traditional self-understandings that the discipline of IR has built from the 1919 myth.

## THE TRUTH OF 1919

The memory of 1919 has orientated IR scholars' discussions of disciplinary purpose and usefulness. In an era in which the very value of scholarship and scholarly expertise is being questioned, it is worth revisiting this memory. The traditional story attached to the 1919 birth date is that the events of World War I fostered a movement to institutionalise the academic debate about what could be done to resolve global political issues. In the immediate post-war period a range of institutions related to the League of Nations and associated bodies drew their logic and significance from the end of the war – for example, the British Institute of International Affairs, and the Council on Foreign Relations in New York arose out of meetings at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. The key moment of disciplinary institutionalisation is deemed to have been the founding of the Woodrow Wilson Chair at Aberystwyth, which was first occupied by Alfred Zimmern, who subsequently took the first chair in International Relations at Oxford. In 1926, the chair in International Politics at the London School of Economics (LSE) was first occupied by Noel Baker. In disciplinary histories orientated by the 1919 birth story, the naivety of a supposedly predominant group of 'Idealist' IR scholars writing in the inter-war years is supposed to have contributed directly to the events of World War II (see de Carvalho et al., 2011: 745). Subsequently, the discipline of IR would be dominated by IR theoretical 'Realists' seeking to atone for this original sin.

However, a revisionist consensus has emerged over the last twenty years which raises questions about the logical, historical and normative value of this 1919 storyline for narrating the history of IR. Firstly, disciplinary historians demonstrated that it is implausible to suggest that International Relations as an intellectual field emerged after the end of World War I (Olson, 1972: 19). Intellectual debates about concepts such as anarchy or international organisation began much earlier (Schmidt, 1998; Vitalis, 2015; Hobson, 2012). Little about the intellectual field really appeared only after 1919 (de Carvalho et al., 2011). Furthermore, secondly, whilst the intellectual field emerged well before 1919, International Relations as a professionalised academic discipline taught in universities emerged quite some time after 1919 (Olson, 1972: 13). Whilst some relevant institutions appeared in the inter-war years, IR as a professionalised university subject was really a post-1945 phenomenon (Ashworth, 2013). Thirdly, 1919 is clearly a British-centric birth-date (Ashworth, 2013: 9). 1919ers occasionally have a vested interest in the date, since it establishes the country they live in, or even the university they work at, as a founding location for IR (Booth,

2017). Fourthly, the 1919 birth date is problematically externalist (Thies, 2002). Whilst some adopt a fully internalist approach to disciplinary history (Schmidt, 1998), revisionists have been concerned about reflecting upon the complexity involved in relating historical events (like World War I) to intellectual activities (Quirk and Vigneswaran, 2005: 103). Private foundations, for example, clearly played a more significant mediating role in IR's creation as a discipline than that which the 1919 story-line allows for them (Palmer, 2017; Guilhot, 2011).

Fifthly, and related to the above, the 1919 story articulates IR as a heroic discipline devoted to fostering peaceful relationships in the international realm through truth-seeking. This narrative leaves IR's problematic Eurocentrism unconsidered – as well as glossing over the regular overlap of its truth-seeking endeavours with practices of state hegemony, imperialism or even racism (Hobson, 2012). 1919 is a myth of disciplinary innocence that elides problematization of the field. Tied to this, the 1919 birth story rests on the construct of an intellectual grouping of Idealists who are supposed to have emerged after the end of World War I and who believed that international relations could be remade in light of the truth that this conflict revealed. These Idealists would be critiqued and defeated by Realists, who saw the truth of international relations as unavoidably conflictual, in what has come to be called the 'First Great Debate'. Revisionist scholars have unpicked the construct of the 'First Great Debate', which emerges mainly from a loose reading of E.H Carr – a point which reinforces the parochialism of the 1919 birth story (Ashworth, 2013: 304; Quirk and Vigneswaran, 2005). Whilst some revisionist disciplinary historians (e.g. Oslander, 1998) observe that what the inter-war scholars had in common has been misunderstood, it is clear that there was no coherent theory of 'Idealism' for Realists to critique (Long, 1991). There is, as Wilson (1998) put it, some "absurdity" in the diversity of thinkers squashed under this label, including Alfred Zimmern, Norman Angell, H. N. Brailsford, Leonard Woolf, Philip Noel-Baker and David Mitrany (see Ashworth, 2006: 280–291). Their common themes of discussion concerning the viability of the League of Nations architecture, or addressing the political economies of imperialism in the aftermath of the Great War did not signify a shared theoretical approach to truth-seeking (Schmidt, 1998: 438; Ashworth, 2006: 297). Quirk and Vigneswaran (2005) develop the argument that the 'First Great Debate' is essentially a retrospective construction which underwrites a teleology of progress towards the Realist theoretical claim to have monopolised the truth about IR (see also Thies, 2002).

Given the above, why not let the centenary of 1919 pass with a whimper? Revisionists have shown it to be a problematic birth date, but they have also shown that the 1919 story casts a long shadow over subsequent IR scholarship. As Quirk and Vigneswaran (2005: 106) note, it is only through identifying the "idiosyncrasies that pervade the history of ideas" that "questions about the nature and purpose of IR scholarship can take center-stage". Whilst the 1919 birth story is a retrospective con-

struction, “it is no coincidence that this [construction] occurs as the discipline of International Relations moves from its formative stage toward a more permanent, organised presence in academia” (Thies, 2002). If the 1919 birth story “had an inhibiting effect on disciplinary development” (Wilson, 1998), it is important (and useful) to identify how this played out in disciplinary debates about the usefulness of IR as a truth-seeking endeavour.

A key finding of revisionist disciplinary histories is that the 1919 birth story occluded the complexity of inter-war scholarship (Ashworth, 2013: 301). The construct of ‘a tragic failure of Idealism’ as an explanation for World War II obfuscated the continuing attraction to, and widespread sympathy for the idea of a practical emphasis in all of international studies, which remained prevalent after the war. What Spencer referred to as the “constructive imagination” was central to Realist accounts of IR after World War II (Thies, 2002: 157). What Olson (1972: 12) termed the “ameliorative emphasis” of inter-war thought was not alien to scholarship after the war. Thies (2002) argued that a “Utopian Realism” characterised most of the key thinkers involved in establishing a disciplinary IR after 1945 with the support of major US foundations (see also Guilhot, 2015).

Obfuscating the post-war continuity from the interwar years is a central effect of the 1919 birth story. By claiming that the authors of the interwar years were all members of a coherent Idealist theoretical approach who shared the culpability for World War II, Realists could argue that their theoretical approach alone could resolve the problem of usefulness revealed by the failures of Idealism. Idealism’s alleged lack of utility, signalled by its inability to prevent World War II, is what supposedly reveals the singular or ‘monist’ truth of Realism. This account of the early stages of the discipline required rhetorically eliding the ambiguous plurality of scholars who wrote during the inter-war years, and their continuities into the subsequent period, so as to frame the discipline through a narrative of progress towards ‘the truth’, and thus usefulness.

Disciplinary historians also observe that alongside their substantial theoretical pluralism, the authors of the interwar years shared a sense of the need (for what would soon become ‘IR scholarship’) to communicate with diverse publics. Osiander (1998) argued that in the period leading up to and during the interwar years, a commonly recognised challenge was that the effects of interdependence were poorly understood by the mass public, and that academics correspondingly had a responsibility to, as Angell put it, overcome the obstacles in the “public mind” that created “mental inertia” (Angell, 1918). This concern for communicating with diverse publics had its roots in the period before 1919, reflecting broader scholarly cultures of the time, but was further fostered by scholarly reflections on the war itself (Quirk and Vigneswaran, 2005). Ginn’s work, for example, had brought together the pursuit of education for peace and institutionalist projects (Theis, 2002). As Hob-



son made clear, at the core of inter-war conceptions of academic practice was a sense that “in the long-term... the success of the international government rested on an informed world public” (Long, 1991). Zimmern saw public opinion as far from being “necessarily a force for peace”. Like Angell, he saw his role as that of educating publics so as to better deal with problems of global industrialization (Miller, 1986; Osiander, 1998). Zimmern disagreed with contemporaries like Woolf because he was more pessimistic about the chances of the publicist promoters of the League of Nations.

The intersection between scholarship and public attitudes was a central and broadly consensual concern amongst inter-war scholars. Carr (1936) explicitly raised such concerns after the war. The inter-war authors wrote about and understood their function as attached to, and centrally interpolated with, a vocation for *publicism* – a sense that their publications targeted a diverse and wide array of publics, and that it was constitutive of their professional role to seek to effectively communicate with those publics (Osiander, 1998: 24). Osiander (1998: 429) argues that the key feature common to inter-war and post-war scholarship was that it was addressed not to an academic community of IR scholars, which did not yet exist, but to a “larger public little interested in methodological disquisitions”.

This explicitly *publicist* meter of interwar scholarship is marked in the documentation attached to both the academic and the equally important “non- or quasi-academic” institutions founded in the inter-war years (Olson, 1972: 13). The Woodrow Wilson Chair at Aberystwyth was explicitly orientated by a commitment to a programme of public education and publicism. This is mirrored in the founding statements of the British Institute of International Affairs, which, as was noted in the editorial introduction to the first edition of the house journal in 1922, was to be a “source of information and a guide to judgment in international affairs, to which the publicist may profitably resort in discharging his function of forming the opinion of the wider public to which he appeals.” That “many-sidedness” was also clear at the LSE when the Cassell Chair of International Relations was established there in 1924 (Northedge, 2003). When taking up the 1930 chair at Oxford, Zimmern explicitly called for a publicist vocational remit (Osiander, 1998: 24).

As such, the diversity of theoretical positions and representations of the truth about international relations during the interwar years should not prevent us from recognizing that a broadly common meter of scholarly publicism characterised inter-war IR scholarship *avant la lettre*. This informed the ways in which the subsequent Realist-dominated period took shape. Marxist class-based analyses, Christian pacifisms, legal scholarship, and various liberal internationalisms debated and intersected with a variety of Realist-like analyses during the inter-war years but shared a broad sense of their vocation as defined by a responsibility to engage with plural audiences or publics (Ashworth, 2013). The boundaries between scholarship and think-



tanks were loose and unimportant because there was simply no formalised division between academics, propagandists and policy-promoters.

After World War II, authors following Carr produced rhetorical arguments in a publicist mode which framed the Realist approach as the solution to Idealism's usefulness problem revealed by World War II. This move effaced the pluralism of inter-war scholarship and gave birth to the drive towards a singular all-encompassing or 'monist' truth that would organise the discipline's trajectory and ambitions after 1945. Inter-war IR scholars *avant la lettre* assumed that a confluence of educational functions, policy advisory functions and public engagement functions was implicit to their vocation. The birth-story of 1919 served to elide this publicist meter and the associated attention to a plurality of potential audiences, and foregrounded a construction of the 'failure of Idealists to understand the real truth about IR' in disciplinary histories. This rhetorical coup established the hegemony of Realism as the next stage in disciplinary progress towards the truth, along with the very idea of disciplinarity. The dominant construction of IR's usefulness problem now hinged around the Realists' claim to have monopolised the truth about IR (Guilhot, 2015: 17). Scholars engaged in the formation of IR as a professional academic discipline would thereafter construct the usefulness of the discipline in terms of advancing 'IR Theory,' understood as a project progressively approximating the truth about international relations through a series of 'Great Debates'. The 1919 story contained a core imputation that usefulness is a problem that IR theorists' monist truth-seeking could and must resolve, whereas previously usefulness had been assumed to be the contingent outcome of scholars' pluralist and publicist efforts.

## **THE HISTORY OF THE USEFULNESS PROBLEM AND THE RETURN TO TRUTH-PLURALISM**

### **Questioning the Usefulness of Truth Monism: 1960s–1970s**

The idea that a resolution to the usefulness problem would be secured through IR theory and its pursuit of the monist truth about the international is central to how 1919 was projected into what has often been termed the 'Second Great Debate' in standard disciplinary histories. Rather than emphasizing what divided 'traditional' from 'scientific' scholars during this period, it is more illuminating to look at what concerns about the relationship between usefulness and truth united the IR scholars of the 1960s and 1970s. IR scholars engaged in the 'science versus tradition' debate like Bull, Morgenthau, Kaplan and Singer disagreed on many issues, but they shared a project of critical reflection on the challenges that the pursuit of truth-monism after 1945 had created for the usefulness of international studies.

Morgenthau (1967: 241) argued that IR was distinctive as a discipline in that despite many attempts to invent a general 'theory of IR', it had been characterised by

the “consistent experience of failure”. Morgenthau (ibid.: 247) also viewed the disciplinary history of IR as a descent from usefulness. He argued that post-war theories in IR had entered a “new phase... marked by a number of academic schools of thought – behaviorism, systems analysis, game theory, simulation, and methodology in general – that have one aim in common: the pervasive rationalization of international relations by means of a comprehensive theory” (ibid.: 242). Morgenthau recognised that “the ultimate purpose is practical: to increase the reliability of production and thereby remove uncertainty from political action”, but he argued that this signified the birth of an entirely new account of practicality, which “attempts to eradicate obstacles to pervasive rationalization... by overwhelming them with theoretical devices” (ibid.: 242). Morgenthau argued that theoretical work in this vein was animated by the urge to create “truth utopias” (ibid.: 243). This reconstituted the usefulness problem facing the discipline.

For Morgenthau, ‘scientific’ IR theories, inasmuch as they are animated by a utopian approach to truth, simplify or disregard politics by turning it into “something else” that is more “susceptible to pervasive rationalization”, in most cases, the type of rationalization preferred by and pioneered in Economics. When theory “transforms itself into a dogma” in this way, it loses its ability “to confront what governments do, and what governments and peoples think, about international relations with independent prudential judgements”, specifically by banishing the “devils, demons and witches” of belief (ibid.: 247). Morgenthau’s (ibid.: 247) central claim was that theoretical work after 1945 had functionally resulted in the collapse of scholarly distance from the assumptions of state foreign policy makers. The pursuit of scientific truth utopias had led to work that “tend[ed] to support the status quo, that is, the official doctrine”, providing “a respectable protective shield” for state practitioners (ibid.).

Hedley Bull (1969: 20–38) gave a very similar account of the usefulness problem faced by IR in light of the pursuit of the singular or monist ‘truth of IR’ after 1945. He rejected the scientific aspiration to “a theory of international relations whose propositions are based either upon logical or mathematical proof, or upon strict empirical procedures or verification” (ibid.: 23). Bull suggested that the use of the scientific approach is far less obviously identifiable with ‘official doctrine’ than Morgenthau supposed (ibid.: 26). Bull shared with Morgenthau, however, an indictment of the new approaches for their inability to recognise the role of intuitive guesses and judgement in answering questions “which cannot by their very nature be given an objective answer, and which can only be probed, clarified, reformulated, and tentatively answered from some arbitrary standpoint, according to the method of philosophy” (ibid.). The scientific approach, in seeking to establish an objective theoretical viewpoint, was unable to recognise and act upon the recurrent need to rebuild new theories “from the foundations up” (ibid.: 30). An inadequately examined commitment

to truth monism was thus, for Bull, a barrier to useful scholarship. Advocates of the scientific approach “cut themselves off from history and philosophy”, which resulted in “an uncritical attitude towards their own assumptions”. The result, Bull claimed, was “shoddy thinking and the subordination of inquiry to practical utility” (ibid.: 33). Bull thus suggested that the pursuit of truth monism after 1945 had placed the scholarly distance that is constitutive of the usefulness of IR into question.

Morton Kaplan (1969: 39) believed, by contrast, that scientific methods are applicable to social life, but agreed that “the human capacity to find parallels in history defies our ability to code or to articulate” (ibid.: 42). He emphasised the necessary role of creativity and “intuition” in scientific scholarship. For Kaplan, modern science is always “hypothetical”, as it cannot seek or achieve objective certainty or necessity (ibid.: 43). Kaplan was incensed by the implication that thinkers as diverse as Deutsch, Russett, and Schelling could be usefully understood as a singular body of theory to which common criticisms could apply. He, like Morgenthau and Bull, was concerned about the elision of theoretical pluralism in their contemporary field of IR. Kaplan (ibid.: 55) accused Bull of listing “highly disparate methods and subjects with minimal discussion and inadequate or non-existent classification and appl[ying] to them extremely general criticisms”.

Kaplan (ibid.: 57) was principally concerned with avoiding “reification” in the form of “practitioners... mistak[ing] the models for reality”. As he put it, the propensity to “apply very simplified assumptions to very complex events” is a “human tendency” to be resolutely struggled against. He claimed that the theoretical claims made by IR scholars can only *rarely* be seen as directly applicable. Indeed, he saw the scientific method as good for precluding “incautious application” of theories to irrelevant contexts. Ensuring caution about the usefulness of theoretical claims was the principal function he assigned to scientific truth-seeking in IR, so as to avoid “undisciplined speculation” or smuggling in theoretical conclusions about usefulness in advance (ibid.: 58, 59). As for Morgenthau and Bull, Kaplan was concerned about maintaining a distance between a pluralist scholarly field of contingent and provisional truth-claims that must be continuously refined and revisited, and assumptions about policy applicability.

J. David Singer (1969: 63) stated that his position was not to be identified with Kaplan’s, yet he clearly shared the same concerns regarding the need to maintain IR theoretical pluralism and scholarly distance as conditions of possibility for the usefulness of IR. As Singer put it, “we can never describe the real world, all we can do is record and exchange symbolic representations of reality. Even though we must (and do) strive for the truest representation, we can never be certain that we have found it. Thus, it is as legitimate to ask whether our models are useful as it is to ask if they are true” (ibid.: 76). Singer argued that all theoretical “models leave much to be desired” and should be discarded when a “more useful one comes along”. He

thus emphasised the value of “diversity of style and strategy” across IR (ibid.: 76). He observed that “traditionalists seem much more willing than the modernisers to speak out on matters of public policy, with the latter often hiding behind the argument that our knowledge is still much too inadequate, or that we should not use our status as ‘experts’ to exercise more political influence than other citizens” (ibid.: 80).

The aim of the scientific method, Singer argued, was “eliminating the possibility that we will come out where we want to come out” (ibid.). The scientific method could ensure that greater humility would be assigned to disciplinary claims about the usefulness of the disciplines’ truth-claims. For Singer, scientific methods could lead to the confidence to make radical changes in policy; otherwise decisions were more likely to be made by default in international politics, or from an inertia derived from fear of error. He believed IR scholarship was useful for helping us to understand the various psychological “factors which contaminate foreign policy problem solving and that of other governments” (Singer, 1970: 148). Singer’s case for IR as a scientific endeavour was that scientific methods would restrain ill-considered applications of theory, and help maintain scholars’ distance from policy makers’ irrational assumptions (Singer, 1961: 326).

These four participants in what came to be called the ‘Second Great Debate’ all advocated for a *plurality of theories* rather than a singular theoretical pathway to the truth about IR, and all emphasised the need to *maintain a space between scholars and practitioners*. They saw these two principles as conditions of possibility for the usefulness of scholarship in this field, sustaining contact and intelligibility vis-à-vis practitioners. Whilst their differences are significant, the traditional telling of the story of the ‘Second Great Debate’ effaces critical commonalities in how the relationship between usefulness and truth was being viewed by scholars working during this period. The 1960s and 1970s were characterised by a collective taking-stock in IR regarding the key legacy of the 1919 birth story, the pursuit of truth monism. Contributors to contemporary edited volumes in this period articulated this disciplinary common sense by broadly agreeing that good theory was practically orientated, but that this should not lead scholars to understate the dangers of pursuing direct practicality through claiming their work offered users the whole or monist truth about international politics (Young, 1972: 179, 202; see Michelsen, 2018).

The common concern in the 1960s and 1970s was that IR scholarship had become overly attentive to the needs of states, while ignoring anyone else in international society, from legislators to the public sector or private actors in multiple states, who would also find IR research useful (Bobrow, 1972: 205). Karl Deutsch (1971: 11–27) lamented the chasm between the “amount of serious work [which] has been done to provide policy advice for governments and their agencies, ...[and that which]... has been done to provide specific policy information and proposals for nongovernmental reform groups, civic organizations, labor unions and the general

public". It was argued that there are many uses for scholarly labour, including sensitization to complexity, conceptualization, factual assessment, generalization, extrapolation of trends, and 'formal theory' production for the purpose of prediction (Young, 1972: 187). The pursuit of 'relevance' to state policy risked hampering this usefulness by simply improving scholars' capacity to sell "bad or nonviable theory" to policy makers on the grounds of weighty claims to monist truth-telling (ibid.: 179, 201). Also, the Cold War had brought risks of intellectual short-termism, hubris and scholarly faddism (Hill and Bershoff, 1994: 222; Levine and Barder, 2014: 868). As Allen Whiting (1972), Stanley Hoffman (1977: 10, 12), and others noted, IR took off as a discipline in America as a consequence of US policy-makers' active insertion of scholars into the policy-making process after World War Two. The failures of US policy in Vietnam were assigned to this process, inasmuch as it made it easier for policy makers to hear what they wanted to hear from supposedly objective IR social scientists (see Halberstam 1974).

### **Return to Pluralism: 1970s–1990s**

IR theory was established after 1945 around the myth of the 1919 birth-story, and it was perceived as useful only inasmuch as it was progressing towards the monist truth about IR. This project experienced a crisis of confidence in the 1970s, which resulted in calls for methodological reflection and greater acknowledgment of the value of pluralism in epistemic approaches. This crisis of confidence accelerated trends towards theoretical pluralization in IR from the 1980s onwards (Waeber, 1996; Hoffman, 1989; George, 1989; Lapid, 1989; Zalewski, 1996; Holsti, 1989). Whilst we should not overlook the significant role of approaches like Marxism in the earlier formation of the discipline (Groom, 1984: 207), IR scholars began a pattern of theoretical experimentation in the 1980s which was expressly motivated by the desire to re-engage IR with more diverse users and non-state publics, precisely as authors like Deutsch had recommended in the decade prior.

This pluralist project was forged from the debates of the 1960s and 1970s, and theoretical pluralization was now advocated by authors of various theoretical stripes (Levine and McCourt, 2018). Problematizing the too intimate relationship between IR theory, understood as an aspirationally monist endeavour, and state policy-making was a common theme in 1980s debates (Hoffman, 1989: 60–86; Whitworth, 1989: 265–272). Cox's (1981: 126) claim that "theory is always for someone and for some purpose" was widely expressed, and not particularly contentious. Cable (1981: 301), for example, himself an ex-diplomat, stated in the same year that theoretical research in IR needed to be assessed by asking, "useful to whom and for what purpose?"

The 1980s saw IR scholars seeking to foster different 'kinds' of usefulness by drawing new theoretical resources from French philosophy, Marxian international politi-

cal economy, Frankfurt School critical theory, feminism, and postcolonial or literary theory (George and Campbell, 1990). Breaking with the project of truth monism, the ideal which had determined disciplinary constructions of the usefulness problem after 1945, the theoretical pluralisers of the 1980's advocated for inter-disciplinarity and diversity. Drawing methods, idioms and concepts from feminism, literary theory, geography and philosophy was argued to assist in fostering IR scholars' academic autonomy from state practitioners' assumptions. The usefulness problem as articulated in the 1980s and 1990s was that mainstream IR theorists, operating around the pursuit of a Neorealist-Neoliberal synthesis, had surrendered to the intellectual constraints of Cold War nuclear balancing and the needs of US hegemony (Waever and Neumann, 2005). The pluralisers of the 1980s and 1990s were animated by the desire to ensure a more 'healthy distance' from state policy makers through fostering diversity in approaches to truth-seeking (see Michelsen, 2018).

Adopting interdisciplinary styles of scholarly presentation and communication which unsettled the norms of Cold War foreign policy discourse helped re-establish academics' independence from the state (Eriksson and Sundelius, 2006: 55). The usefulness problem faced by IR was seen to be how "to make room for critical analytical advocacy" whilst resisting the pressures of policy priorities on academic outputs, and the manner in which policy makers often reject out of hand scholarship that does not chime with existing assumptions (Hill, 1994: 20). New theoretical idioms tied to pluralist approaches to truth-telling about IR would allow IR scholars to speak to the suffering, the subaltern and the vulnerable in world politics. Truth-pluralist IR theorists sought to speak to new publics, those struggling against the perceived effects of the established IR theories. The truth pluralisers of the 1980s and 1990s still wanted to be useful, but for a more diverse range of actors.

The push-back was immediate. From the late 1980s it became a widespread trope in disciplinary reactions to what came to be called the 'Third Great' or 'Interparadigm Debate'<sup>1</sup> that IR faced a danger of a 'useless' pluralism tied to rising relativism about truth (Holsti, 1989: 257, 134; Wallace, 1996: 22; Hill and Bershoff, 1994: 4). Faced by approaches that critiqued the settled theoretical traditions and the belief that a single truth of IR could be progressively approximated, a reconstruction of the usefulness problem emerged. It was increasingly claimed, in the United States in particular, that the "divorce" of pluralist theory from policy practitioners had "gone too far" and urgent remedial action needed to be taken (Nau, 2008; Newsom, 1995; Kruzel, 1994).

Several intersecting dynamics were at work here. The rising scale of the discipline had precluded "the kind of clubbable relationship that some scholars had with some practitioners in the 1950s" (Brown, 2006: 677). As George (1993: 11) noted, in professional IR "to get ahead one tries to differentiate one's ideas and scholarly products... importance is attached to establishing individual reputation". The academic



job market fostered a need to publish in the 'right' theoretical journals, and this drove all IR scholars to target their publications at narrow peer audiences (Lepgold, 2000: 77, 366–367). This, in turn, supported the expansion of competitor institutions, especially think tanks, which translated the outputs of IR scholarship for practitioner audiences who could afford it, often states (Walt, 2005; Nye, 2008: 655; Nau, 2008: 641; Lepgold, 2000: 372).

### **Pluralism Without Publicism: 1990s–2018**

The new truth-pluralizing theoretical approaches had accreted all the institutional baggage that came with disciplinarity, and accordingly developed their own specialised vocabularies or publishing jargons. The use of increasingly complicated prose within the rising pluralist theoretical schools of IR meant that direct links between the scholars and external users of scholarship became accordingly more tenuous (Reus-Smit, 2012: 525; Brown, 2006). Increasingly, only academics working within each pluralist theoretical in-group, including Gramscian, poststructuralist, feminist, constructivist, and postcolonial approaches, could properly digest, and cared about, what the other academics within each theoretical in-group were saying. The theoretical pluralisers expressly hoped that their concepts and jargons would be ill-suited to misuse by state practitioners, but they were also incomprehensible to most other non-academic publics, including non-state practitioners (George, 1993: 9). The issue was not so much a problem of pluralist 'relativism' about truth, but the apparent disappearance of any shared disciplinary – and extra-disciplinary – modes of communication.

In the 1990s, an accusation became increasingly common: that truth-pluralizing IR scholars had made a choice to turn away from action-guiding work and needed to think again (Nye, 2008: 652). The prescription offered so as to resolve the usefulness problem now facing the discipline was that IR scholars needed to "work harder" to communicate with policy makers, and thus be more useful (Kruzel, 1994: 180–181). It was argued that scholars should improve their communication with practitioners by using less jargon. George (1993) advocated for the value of transitional actors who could facilitate communication between policy actors and academia. Academics needed to learn the presentational forms that user-practitioners could engage with. Increasingly, the 'usefulness problem' facing IR was conceived as a reflection of the expanding chasm between IR theoreticians and one specific public – state policy makers.

However, George (*ibid.*) had expressly not advocated that all scholars become 'policy relevant', and argued only that they might work more on communication. By the turn of the millennium, it was being argued that IR scholars should universally consider changing the theoretical mode of their work. The suggestion was that all IR scholars should do more case-specific studies and historical parables, in other



words, produce the forms of theoretical knowledge about the international that state practitioners wanted and needed. Jentleson (2000: 130) argued that abstract general theories have very little or no international policy utility. The theoretical abstraction prized by IR's truth-pluralisers was now increasingly equated to policy uselessness. For Jentleson (2000: 145, 132), "mid-range" theory, concerned with contingent local problematizations, was to become the singular vocation of IR scholarship. This refitted, with significantly lower ambitions, the post-1945 belief attached to the traditional telling of the 1919 story – that it was the theoretical form of monist truth seeking which IR scholars adopted that could resolve the discipline's usefulness problem.

Lepgold (in Lepgold and Nincic, 2000: 370) saw that the emerging "consensus" around the turn of the millennium was that "mid-range theory is best". IR theorists were increasingly advised to pursue the "contingent generalizations" which state policy-makers find most useful (ibid.: 370–371). The risks associated with the narrowing of the field and its interlocutors, which had been widely critiqued in the 1970s following the experience of Vietnam, were still recognised, but it was nonetheless concluded that doing more policy-relevant mid-range theory would generically strengthen the discipline (Nincic, 2000: 11–12). Applied theory was seen as "empirically more meaningful and *more focused on the truth of its premises* than a programme of knowledge creation dominated by the reward structure of disinterested theory" (ibid.: 45, my emphasis). There was a caveat that IR scholars should worry about "narrow partisan objectives" influencing their truth-claims, but it was balanced by the assumption that the professionalism of the modernised IR academy would prevent any scholar's crude absorption into state practitioners' biases (Lepgold, 2000: 373, 44).

There is little doubt that specialist vernaculars did arise with the pursuit of IR theoretical pluralization. IR researchers received calls for academics to 'do more mid-range theory' as bearing a danger that policy-makers would reabsorb them in service to the state. The mid-to late 2000's consequently saw an expansion of self-described 'Critical' approaches to IR, particularly concentrated in the UK (Mearsheimer, 2005). This process accelerated after 9/11 through the proliferation of innumerable specialist 'Critical Studies' journals. These new journals were created to be homes for the theoretical pluralisers, who now felt increasingly under assault by those proclaiming that mid-range theory was generically more 'truthy' and therefore useful, and who claimed that fostering theoretical pluralism better served the epistemic interests of publics that did not include state policy makers.

However, there were – and are – clearly grounds to query whether these radical Critical theoretical pluralisers were actually communicating with any publics whatsoever (Holden, 2002: 253–270). Students trained in IR Critical methods were fed a diet of normative arguments for the superiority of denser approaches to the pres-

entation of theoretical analyses, which fostered new generations of Critical academics who saw little value in communicating with a plurality of publics in mind – and sometimes viewed such communication as undermining their critical credentials. Rather than calling for any reconstruction of IR's publicist vocation, theoretical pluralisers settled into local discursive styles and modes, producing work that was targeted at and comprehensible to peer-groups of IR theorists working within the same theoretical subcultures. This was justified inasmuch as pluralist truth-seeking was viewed as a generic good. This was furthermore, in part, a natural function of the rising institutionalization of once marginal or dissident IR theoretical subcultures like Feminism, Poststructuralism and Postcolonialism (Weber, 2014). These dissident theoretical subcultures often saw themselves as useful inasmuch as they were committed to breaking the mould of mainstream IR theory. They remained bitterly opposed by those who advocated for the necessity of a transformative remembrance of the policy world through a discipline revolving around the monist truth-seeking promised by mid-range theory.

This brief history of the usefulness problem in IR has recounted the legacy of the 1919 birth story by tracing the breakdown of its implication that usefulness is a problem that could and must be resolved through theoretical work that progresses ever closer to the monist 'truth about IR'. The 1919 story effaced the publicist as well as pluralist roots of the field, setting IR on a path of truth monism after 1945. Subsequent attempts to recover truth pluralism, and thereby secure the usefulness of the discipline for a more diverse range of actors and agencies, which accelerated after 1980, involved little or no consideration of the vocation for public communication that animated the pre-professional writings of the inter- and post-war years. The centenary of 1919 provides an opportunity to address the limits of advocating for theoretical pluralism without a wider disciplinary commitment to publicism in IR.

## THE CHALLENGE OF PUBLICISM IN A POST-TRUTH ERA

In July 2018, a group of leading International Relations scholars in the US took out a full-page advert in the *New York Times* which advocated for the value of the international order and its existing institutions. This public action follows similar public statements on the Second Iraq War and the now collapsed Iran deal. Notwithstanding the obvious impotence that this history of IR scholarly public interventions implies, the fact that leading IR scholars see such actions as necessary suggests something may be awry with respect to the wider societal valuation of pluralist IR scholarship as a useful truth-seeking endeavour. The loose connection between academics' truth-seeking and their credibility as truth-tellers is a central feature of what has been termed our "post-truth era" (Suiter, 2016).

This alone would give cause to reconsider Lawson's (2008: 18) call for a "Public International Relations". Lawson (ibid.: 20) distinguished a "public" IR from the "cult

of the public intellectual”, as well as from simply the pursuit of state ‘policy relevance’. Instead, the “central point of a more publicly oriented academic enterprise is the fostering of ties with multiple publics” and a “step away from cloistered scholasticism.” He argued that a public IR would

think much more fluidly about the multiple ways in which IR is communicated. Rather than endorsing the homogenization of what is considered to be the ‘proper’ means of communicating scholarship via niche journals, university presses and other forms of regulated texts, a public IR would be much more open to how communication both with and between international publics and professional researchers takes place (ibid.: 31).

The history of IR’s debates about the relationship between truth and usefulness charted above gives further reason to reconsider the need for a ‘public IR’ today. I have argued above that a central driver behind IR’s theoretical pluralisation in the 1980s and 1990s was the impulse to recover IR for its lost *non-state* publics. Of course, pluralization occurred across the social sciences, with fracturing in epistemic approaches taking place in all the social science disciplines (Jahn, 2017). IR, however, is distinctive in that the problem of usefulness has been so central to its disciplinary identity, which is framed by the legacy of the 1919 birth story. The truth-pluralisers that arose out of the debates of the 1970s and 1980s embraced increasingly narrow forms of scholarly communication in the hope of avoiding being of direct utility only to statesmen and women. Pluralisation thus occurred with little attached sense of obligation to effectively communicate pluralist truth claims to more diverse audiences, and this condition cut across IR theoretical approaches.

This condition establishes the challenge of publicism for IR today. To write and publish is at the heart of any academic profession, as is the drive to do so differently than other writer-publishers such as journalists. The challenge of academic publicism, understood as a matter of communicating the outputs of academic truth-seeking with the widest possible range of audiences in mind, would seem to have a special pertinence for IR, however. After all, that IR aspires to a universal public audience for its truth-claims is inscribed into the name of the discipline, concerned as it is with ‘relations’ that are ‘international’. IR seeks to constitute a space for debate about the international, from which explanations and understandings can be offered and disagreed with, and possible actions deliberated by diverse but thus informed *global* publics (see Abraham and Abramson, 2017). As Justin Rosenberg has noted, the uniqueness of the international, as defined by the “co-presence of multiple interacting societies,” is IR’s signature concern (2016). All global actors, whether they are states, social movements or individuals, need to justify their choices or decisions about actions that relate to the international realm, and must

rely on concepts which IR scholars develop and evaluate. This is why it can be so convincingly argued that IR meta-theoretical research is as ‘useful’ as specific puzzle- or case-focussed research (Jahn, 2017). However, recognising the usefulness of IR theory as *such* does not address the problem that not all (indeed very little) IR theoretical research reaches any public audiences whatsoever. The reasons for this have been charted above, and are attached to the modes of presentation for its ideas that professional IR scholarship adopted over the last half century as it returned to truth-pluralism.

It is worth noting that various approaches to fostering public communication have been pursued by pluralist IR scholars, from academics collaborating with activists and artists to them taking on roles in the professional training of acting diplomats; becoming policy advisors to international organisations, non-state organisations and activist charities; producing short articles for policy-journals, blogs or newspapers; creating briefings; working as consultants; delivering executive educational seminars; or publishing collective open letters as newspaper adverts addressing issues such as the Iraq War, the Iran deal or the value of international institutions. What is critical to note is that the success or failure of these public engagements has little or nothing to do with the IR theory being communicated or its normative content. It is a matter of how effectively the scholars in question were able to communicate the relevance and credibility of their theoretical claims (Freedman, 2017). IR’s usefulness to specific actors is not placed in question by ‘truth pluralism’ as such. I would argue, however, that the usefulness of IR is placed in question by a pattern of failure to consider how scholars might communicate effectively with diverse international publics simultaneously, and thus dedicate collective efforts, across theoretical approaches, to a broader responsibility for public education. This is the central legacy of the 1919 story. The 1919 story elided any sense that international theorists might have a special responsibility to communicate so as to be comprehensible to (internationally) plural audiences.

The processes of transmission of IR scholarship from journals into the field of international practice are highly uncertain, as information, concepts, ideas, suppositions, intuitions, misinterpretations, and oversimplifications diffuse into various user-worlds through secondary publications, and increasingly online (Walt, 2005). The settled publishing architecture of the modern academy clearly invites pretenders to scholarly expertise, who (together with journalists) inhabit the liminal space where academic ideas are diffused. It seems likely that the expanding number of avenues for diffusion contributes to the rising popular distrust in claimants to expert knowledge about international affairs, inasmuch as formal academic credentials appear less and less important for the capacity to make credible truth claims online (Seldon, 2010). As Lawson (2008: 20) notes, scholars becoming more effective at communicating with general publics may lead to “unlikable” success

stories such as Samuel Huntington's, but this is precisely a case through which IR scholars could reassess their responsibility for engaging in effective public communication.

Scholars are often called to act as talking heads in television debates. Academics are encouraged to engage in this practice primarily to promote research published in 'serious' academic media, mostly articles and books. However, the entertainment focus of television debates means that commentators tend to be re-called based on their capacity to communicate a snappy top line (Lawson, 2008: 13, 28). Whilst the role of a TV public intellectual can be adopted constructively, the forms of public engagement that TV and associated media foster appear to have played a role in the societal decline in public trust in expert knowledge (Seldon, 2010). The War on Terror, for example, created a surge in claimants to expert knowledge on terrorist issues who emerged out of the plurality of theoretical perspectives, but whose legitimacy as experts is notoriously difficult or impossible to assess within the short TV segments on which they appear.

Alternatively, an explicit commitment to scholarly activism has been central to what Boltanski (2011) refers to as "metacritical" approaches to IR, like Marxist, Post- or De-colonial, and Feminist IR theories. The scholars using such approaches seek to engage, as part of their research practice, in political mobilisation, challenges to government, or direct action (Newell and Stavrianakis, 2017). Holding the "state to account for its actions abroad" may be a motivation, and the argument has been made that this cannot be done by academics in isolation (Herring, 2006). To be useful, self-described Critical scholars enter into 'alliances' with non-academic actors. The challenges here are identical to those faced by scholars when they act as bridges to state-policy practitioners. Practitioner-orientated work is always valued locally inasmuch as it speaks to the structures of common sense that circulate in specific practitioner communities. However, a lack of distance from specific practitioner assumptions always risks entrapping conceptions of the usefulness of IR scholarship within those local structures of common sense, whether the aim is 'critical' or supportive of the state.

There is, of course, nothing remiss or unusual about scholars targeting specific practitioners with their publications and hoping to be useful in specific ways, but the IR scholar cannot predetermine through their choice of theoretical style for whom and what their work will prove to be useful, even if this is because it is effectively "misconstrued" (Cable, 1981: 310–314). All theoretical scholarship has potential uses which will not align with the authors' political or normative preferences, or their intentions (Weizman, 2006). It has been argued that the usefulness of IR plays out over extended time frames and that this is why excessive attention to its usefulness can be a problem, but the ambiguous meanings and interpretations that all readers give to scholarship are also extended through time. Professional IR schol-

ars have been self-conscious of their role as participants in that which they study, but less effective in acknowledging the diversity of the audiences that might be engaged by scholarly writings, and of how international readers may disagree with IR scholars' normative impulses whilst still finding their work useful.

Adopting dense and complicated modes of presentation for IR's scholarly ideas has not precluded their misuse or ensured that the originally intended use of a scholarly output would be realised at a later date. Indeed, as the arguments IR theorists developed have been communicated in increasingly difficult or elusive language, there has been a just as good or a better chance that they might become more open to intentionally misleading representations, as well as to simple misunderstandings. Perfect 'transparency' is impossible, for no amount of precision can guard against misinterpretation, but pursuing the widest possible communicability renders IR scholarship less open to being intentionally misconstrued (McCarthy and Fluck, 2016).

Critical IR scholars sometimes greet the injunction to 'have an impact' on policy with some degree of anxiety and concern (Jones, 2009). These concerns relate to the fear that pursuing relevance forces scholars to write for the benefit of audiences (economic, state or military actors, for example) that they might not wish to serve. Developing specialised jargons for publications did not, however, provide a solution to this problem. As truth-pluralist IR theories became increasingly difficult for non-specialists to comprehend, academic findings developed within these approaches appear to have fostered significantly less than emancipatory aims. This has been particularly clear with respect to research findings concerning discourse, rhetoric and power in international politics, which have been well-learned by state and non-state strategic communicators, propagandists, populist demagogues, information warriors, and public relations nation-branding experts (see Miskimmon et al., 2014; 2017; Michelsen and Colley, 2018; Castells, 2013; also see the Introduction and Colin Wight in this special issue). The populist communications techniques that characterise the politics of the so-called post-truth era suggest a sensitivity to the fluid relationship between truth and power in world politics that few poststructuralists are keen to claim as one of their useful research impacts (see Aradau and Huysmans, 2018; Tallis, 2016).

IR poststructuralist responses to the so-called 'post-truth' condition, and in particular to populists' embrace of multiple truths and alternative facts, have focused on the ways in which scientific credibility may be assembled and understood as socially embedded, whilst refusing to surrender to the claim that there is "only one truth" (See Aradau and Huysmans, 2018: 14). If, however, as Aradau and Huysmans (2018) compellingly argue, the "distinctiveness of science" must be "conceptualized socially rather than just epistemologically or methodologically", then IR scholars' responsibility to effectively communicate with that social world is an issue that



deserves much more consideration. Where IR pluralists' discussions of the 'post truth condition' have examined approaches to scholarly communication with the social world, pluralist public engagement has been viewed only through the prism of "organic" political activism in the Gramscian sense, or the "ironist" practice of deconstructing the knowledge claims of the powerful (Berling and Beuger, 2017). In IR's recent responses to the post-truth condition, the possibility that there may be a relationship between publicism and the value of pluralist IR scholarship as *such* has not been scrutinised.

This issue requires attention because new technologies play an increasingly important role in mediating contemporary pluralist IR scholarship in relationship to diverse global publics. The rise of IR blogs has led to them, in some cases, becoming de facto quasi-scholarly outlets or being used for preparations of texts for publication in more recognised forms, or as post-publication promotional tools.<sup>2</sup> The proliferation of blogs on varied subjects does not, however, guarantee any escape from the sound-biteism of the public intellectual. The fragmentation in IR's theoretical languages corresponds perfectly with the nature of the 'many-to-many' new media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter. As Castells (2013) has noted, new social media tools may be routes to 'communication power,' but they are far from democratic. Online microclimates of belief and assumption allow for thought ecosystems to subsist, hermetically sealed from one another. The online world of blogging is a perfect space for the hyper-specialised discourses of IR. As old and new media interact in a fraught cycle, the online space has achieved an increasingly targeted audience segmentation. The distinctive information ecologies within which blogs exist do not offer reliable means for scholars to access multiple publics simultaneously. They mitigate in the opposite direction. Indeed, online content distribution accelerates the fragmentary dynamics within IR scholarship that have marked its history since 1980. Various claimants to having the correct, most emancipatory, or more ethical truth-pluralist theoretical approach mean that online one finds highly differentiated audiences which come into relatively little contact with one another. When they do come into contact, as a consequence of their prior hermetic isolation online, the result is a shrill disagreement rather than a debate. Those audiences which scholars might most hope to challenge, engage and inform are invariably the least accessible.

The algorithms through which content is distributed by online social networks often result in the exclusion of 'disagreeable' content. The emergence of podcasts and vlogging as means for public engagement are thus limited, with any potential for extended access to plural audiences bought at the cost of a narrowing in their received credibility. New media content is shared and distributed based on its entertainment value and inoculated against any effective peer review. In garnering credibility from the scale of viral distribution, and mutual referencing within closed



online theory-networks, new media communications technologies do not foster conditions for publicist IR; they rather further contribute to the democratization of claims to expertise about international affairs, which render the pluralist IR scholar as one voice within a cacophony of equal opinions.

The reconsideration of the discipline's approach to books, or rather eBooks, is perhaps a more promising development. Books have become a somewhat paradoxical medium for IR research as the trend towards pluralization increasingly characterized the discipline and its engagements with the usefulness problem. As a book is too lengthy a medium to expect an undergraduate or Master's student to read it in a single pedagogic session, they have departed from the IR syllabus, or are now widely read only in part (this is particularly true of classic texts like *Politics Among Nations* or *The Twenty Years' Crisis*). Introductions to books have tended to become micro-essays designed for this purpose. It has also been observed that policy makers do not read books, preferring executive summaries produced by think tanks and policy journals (Lepgold, 1998). Books, however, retain their symbolic power in academic contexts, and the result is that academics use books to communicate their most difficult and exclusionary theoretical discourses, adding somewhat more digestible introductions that are suitable for student consumption.

Short eBooks might provide a practicable way to balance the demands of peer review with global public accessibility at a relatively low publication cost. Short form series like Palgrave Pivot are already appearing in academic publishing. There is, it is reasonable to assume, a global public appetite for low cost, essay-form eBook series targeted at making critical debates about the uncertain and transforming contemporary global political arena accessible. These books exist but they are all too rarely written by professional IR theorists (see Nagle, 2017, for an example).

In any case, the centenary of 1919 provides an opportunity to rekindle the debate about IR's usefulness by focussing attention on how the discipline might better communicate with diverse global publics in our so-called post-truth era. Improving IR scholars' capacity to sell poor theoretical work to audiences by effectively identifying and arguing in line with their biases obviously does the field of IR no favours. This is as true for those writing for an audience of security professionals as it is for those writing for an audience of rights activists (Young, 1972: 179, 201). Indeed, it is the pursuit of relevance to *individual audiences* that constitutes the usefulness problem for IR theory today. IR scholars need to rediscover their vocation for creating publications that seek to reach and access diverse global publics. This is also the case regardless of the content or political ambition of the work, whether it is devoted to helping policy makers win wars, fostering decolonial or gender-rights activism, or seeking to unpick the foundations of expert claims (Berling and Bueger, 2017). Certainly, rather than claiming to know the real truth about the value of the international order in newspapers, IR scholars might

serve their vocation better by reflecting on the scale of IR's collective failure, over the last one hundred years, to speak in ways that plural global publics could and would engage.

## CONCLUSION

The pre-eminent 'IR' scholars of the pre-, inter- and immediate post-war years were publicists. The 1919 ideal elided the sense that their vocation constitutively entailed simultaneously speaking to, and communicating effectively with plural audiences. The discipline subsequently centred around the pursuit of theoretical resolutions to the 'usefulness problem' as it was variously constructed. The project of finding a monist theoretical resolution to the usefulness problem almost immediately began to break down, with authors in the 1960s and 1970s worrying that IR theorists had maintained insufficient scholarly distance from the interests of states. This led to a proliferation of theories in the 1980s and 1990s which sought to expand the potential audiences to whom IR scholars could effectively and usefully speak. Theoretical pluralisation and associated truth-pluralism could not, however, resolve the challenge of speaking to multiple audiences, and led to increasingly specialised jargon. As a consequence, the idea of a 'policy chasm' arose, and with it the call for IR scholars to do more of the mid-range studies and case work that *state* policy makers find useful.

The problem of the usefulness of IR cannot be resolved theoretically, since pluralism integrally implies that usefulness does not derive from scholars' approximation of the truth. Usefulness is a function of IR scholars' approach to the communication of their work. In making the case for a return to publicism, there is no sense in advocating that IR scholars do less theoretical work, pander to a settled policy-maker or other practitioner 'common sense', or write no publications in learned journals for the consumption of other academics. However, IR at this centenary of 1919 would clearly benefit from fostering more effective means of communication with diverse global publics (Lawson, 2008). IR needs to find ways to communicate its debates simply and concisely whilst retaining the collaborative architecture of peer review. I have suggested that short essay-form eBooks may constitute a promising contemporary means by which IR can make pluralism useful through a reinvigoration of publicism, but this can only be part of the response. My argument constitutes a call for action rather than a full programme for disciplinary reform.

The history of IR's engagements with the usefulness problem has resulted in a return to pluralism, but a turn away from publicism. Whilst political activism may have an important role in IR scholarship, and "education [i]s a key tool in breaking the current distrust of scientific results," to engage effectively with diverse global publics, including those "with little or no education", requires consideration of the language we use, and the choices we make in the presentation of scholarly claims about the international (Berling and Bueger, 2017: 6).

To state my recommendations for IR in concrete terms, pluralist IR scholars must write for, and in ways that are comprehensible to, plural global audiences. Otherwise, pluralists may find their publications inadvertently work in the service of global public miseducation, and foster distrust in all IR scholarly communications. Revealing the social embeddedness of all knowledge of the international is undoubtedly useful, but only inasmuch as it can be communicated effectively and clearly to diverse publics (Aradau and Huysmans, 2018). It is the “decay of language,” Orwell once suggested, that allows a politics of post-truth to thrive (Orwell, 1949). Without a return to publicism, advocating for truth-pluralism may even serve to bolster the appeal of reactionary international politics, which rests on the promise of the simplicity and security of truth (Mackay and LaRoche, 2018). Publicism is the challenge that the discipline’s history of engagements with the usefulness problem has created, and this is how the post-truth era presents itself in IR.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> I view this as a singular ongoing process of theoretical pluralization, running from the 1980s to the present-day, contra Waever (1996).

<sup>2</sup> For good examples of blogs, see E-International Relations, Duck of Minerva, and The Disorder of Things.

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